

**United Nations
Department of Economic and Social Affairs
Division for the Advancement of Women**

AIDE-MEMOIRE

**Expert Group Meeting
The elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child**

I. Introduction

1. In accordance with its multi-year programme of work for 2007-2009, the Commission on the Status of Women will consider “The elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child” as its priority theme during its fifty-first session in 2007. In order to contribute to a further understanding of the issue and to assist the Commission in its deliberations, the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women, in collaboration with the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), is organizing an Expert Group Meeting (EGM) on the topic. The EGM will be hosted by the UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre in Florence, Italy, from 25 to 28 September 2006.

2. The issue of the girl child was firmly placed on the international agenda by the 1990 Declaration of the World Summit for Children which accorded priority attention to the girl child’s survival, development and protection. At the Summit the international community acknowledged that equal rights of girls and equal participation of women in the social, cultural, economic and political life of societies are a prerequisite for successful and sustainable development. The twenty-seventh special session of the General Assembly on Children in 2002 recognized that the achievement of development goals for children, particularly girls, was contingent upon; *inter alia*, women’s empowerment.¹

3. The Beijing Platform for Action recognized that discrimination and violence against girls begin at the earliest stages of life and continue unabated throughout their lives. Girls often have less access to nutrition, physical and mental health care and education and enjoy fewer rights, opportunities and benefits of childhood and adolescence than boys. They are often subjected to various forms of violence and exploitation.²

4. At its forty-second session in 1998, the Commission on the Status of Women considered the theme of the girl child and adopted agreed conclusions, which outlined actions and initiatives aimed at, *inter alia*, the promotion and protection of the human rights of the girl child; education and empowerment of the girl child; improving the health needs of girls, the situation of girls in armed conflict, and combating trafficking and eliminating child labour.³

¹ A/RES/S-27/2, paragraph 23

² Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 4-15 September 1995 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.96.IV.13), chap. I, resolution 1, annex II, paragraph 259

³ E/CN.6/1998/12, page 31

5. The outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly titled “Women 2000: Gender Equality, Development and Peace for the Twenty-first Century”, identified child labour, violence, lack of access to education, and sexual abuse as some of the obstacles that the girl child continues to face⁴.

6. The report of the Secretary-General on the ten-year review of the Beijing Platform for Action concluded that progress has been made by many countries in the advancement of the girl child, in particular in the recognition of the human rights of the girl child through the adoption of appropriate legislation, and in increasing access to primary education. It noted, however, further efforts were needed, *inter alia*, to ensure equal access to secondary education and to job opportunities, to eradicate sex work by children, to ensure reintegration of the girl child after armed conflicts, and to improve collection of data on the situation of the girl child.⁵

7. At the 2005 World Summit, world leaders reaffirmed their previous commitments to eliminate all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls⁶. At its sixtieth session, the General Assembly adopted resolution 60/141 on the girl child, in which it expressed deep concern, *inter alia*, about discrimination against the girl child and the violation of her rights and stressed the importance of a substantive assessment of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action with a life-cycle perspective.

8. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) contain mutually reinforcing principles to ensure protection and fulfillment of the rights of girls and to end gender-based discrimination. CEDAW General Recommendation 24 on women and health emphasizes that girls constitute a vulnerable and disadvantaged group that makes them especially susceptible to sexual abuse and, *inter alia*, disadvantages them in access to information about sexual health.⁷ General comments by CRC have drawn attention to hidden forms of discrimination against girls in, *inter alia*, education, health, including HIV/AIDS, and early marriage.⁸

9. The Secretary-General’s Study on Violence Against Children, to be presented to the General Assembly at its sixty-first session in October 2006, will provide a thorough analysis of the problem, examining the various settings in which children experience violence—the family, schools, other institutional settings, the community and work settings. A gender analysis is central to the study, with the relationship between violence and gender-based violence constituting one of the cross-cutting issues. The Secretary-General’s In-depth Study on Violence Against Women, also to be presented to the General Assembly at its sixty-first session, will examine, *inter alia*, the forms and manifestations of violence against women across their lifespan and State responsibility in eliminating such violence. The Expert Group Meeting will build upon the findings and recommendations of these two studies.

⁴ A/RES/S-23/3, paragraph 33

⁵ E/CN.6/2005/2, paragraphs 494-495

⁶ A/RES/60/1, paragraph 58 (f)

⁷ CEDAW General Recommendation No. 24 (paragraph 6, 12 (b) and 8)

⁸ Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) General Comments No.1 (paragraph 10); No.7 (paragraph 28) and No.4 (paragraph 31)

II. Conceptual Framework for the Expert Group Meeting

10. The Expert Group Meeting will be structured around four main conceptual issues related to the girl child: protection, especially vulnerable situations, empowerment, and institutional arrangements to accelerate elimination of discrimination and violence against the girl child. .

(a) Protection of the girl child

11. Despite the existing international legal framework, girls continue to face de jure and de facto inequalities in virtually all societies. Discrimination and neglect in childhood can initiate a lifelong downward spiral of deprivation and exclusion from the social mainstream. Discrimination and violence against girls takes many forms, including female infanticide and prenatal sex selection and sex selective abortions, early and/or forced marriage, early childbearing, and child labour. Girls may be denied basic rights including access to food and clean water, education and health care. Girls are more vulnerable than boys to all forms of violence, including in the family, community and institutions such as schools or in the context of sports activities. Violence against girls includes domestic violence, sexual exploitation and abuse, including rape during armed conflict; commercial sexual exploitation and trafficking, and harmful traditional practices such as female genital mutilation/cutting, as well as discriminatory legislation and practices in areas such as inheritance rights. Poverty also threatens girls' well-being and development. Specific groups of girls, such as girls between the age of 10 and 14 as well as adolescent married and unmarried girls, are among the most underserved groups in terms of access to education and health care, including reproductive health services.

12. Creating an environment that provides full protection to the girl child requires a broad range of actions including, *inter alia* effective legislation and its enforcement; support services; and awareness raising and training of public officials and other stakeholders. Creating an environment that supports girls' enjoyment of their rights and eliminates structural discrimination will also require concerted efforts to overcome deeply entrenched stereotypes of girls' and boys' gender roles.

(b) The girl child in especially vulnerable situations

13. The intersection of violence against women and girls and HIV/AIDS has gained increased attention at the international level. Concern has been expressed that the global HIV/AIDS pandemic disproportionately affects women and girls and that the majority of new HIV infections occur among young people⁹. It is also recognized that violence against women and girls increased their vulnerability to HIV/AIDS and that HIV infection further increases women's vulnerability to violence. The connection between violence against women and HIV must be understood in the context of discrimination resulting from gender inequality, including women's lack of adequate access to information, education, and health services.¹⁰

⁹ E/CN.6/2006/L.2/Rev.1, preamble

¹⁰ E/CN.4/2005/72, paragraph 21

14. Conflict heightens the risk of girls being exposed to abuse and exploitation, and sexual violence such as torture, rape, forced pregnancy, sexual slavery, forced prostitution and trafficking.¹¹ Girls are often abducted for sexual and other purposes by armed groups and forces. The Special Rapporteur on systematic rape, sexual slavery and slavery-like practices during armed conflict and the Special Rapporteur on violence against women have drawn attention to the human rights violations, including sexual slavery, which are perpetrated against women and girls in times of armed conflict.¹² There is, however; still little awareness of the extreme suffering that armed conflict inflicts on girls or the many roles girls are often forced to play during conflict and its aftermath. In addition, the special needs of women and girls are rarely provided for in demobilization, disarmament and reintegration programmes.¹³

(c) Empowerment of the girl child

15. The empowerment of girls is critical to the achievement of equality.¹⁴ To develop her full potential, the girl child needs to be nurtured in an enabling environment, where her spiritual, intellectual and material needs for survival, protection and development are met and her equal rights safeguarded.¹⁵ Empowerment is a critical tool to prevent and eliminate gender-based violence, and the elimination of violence against women and girls enables them to participate equally in decision-making.¹⁶ Girls' empowerment can be enhanced through access to all levels of education; access to good quality health care and services, including reproductive health information and services; and equal participation with boys in all spheres of society. It requires partnerships with men and boys, as well as the engagement of families, communities, the state and other actors.

16. The empowerment of girls can be enhanced by increasing recognition of their disproportionate burden of domestic work, and their contribution to household economies. Education provides the opportunity for girls to acquire a range of knowledge and skills critical to negotiating an equal place in society,¹⁷ including through accessing employment and decision-making processes. Girls, however, are often discriminated against in access to all levels of education. Factors which constrain the development of girl-friendly school environments – such as the lack of women teachers, proper sanitation facilities, and safety both in and outside school, as well as the persistence of gender-biased curricula – need to be addressed. Removing obstacles and strengthening the capacity of girls to build their self-esteem and take on leadership roles, including through the use of information technology, are central to their empowerment.

¹¹ UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children 2006: Excluded and Invisible*, page 14

¹² Office of the Special Representative on children and armed conflict (<http://www.un.org/special-rep/children-armed-conflict/English/GirlsinWar.html>)

¹³ Office of the Special Representative on children and armed conflict (<http://www.un.org/special-rep/children-armed-conflict/English/GirlsinWar.html>)

¹⁴ S-27/2 A, paragraph 23

¹⁵ Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 4-15 September 1995 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.96.IV.13), chap. II, paragraph 39

¹⁶ E/CN.6/2006/15, page 30, para 12

¹⁷ UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children 2006: Excluded and Invisible*, page 22

(d) Institutional arrangements to accelerate elimination of discrimination and violence against girls

17. Effectively eliminating discrimination and violence against the girl child will require attention to critical institutional mechanisms, including sex disaggregated data on the girl child for further development of policies and programmes to address their specific needs.¹⁸ The United Nations Statistics Division publication, *The World's Women 2005: Progress in Statistics*, reported a mixed record on preparation of data disaggregated by sex and age and called for increased collaboration to review concepts, definitions and methods of collecting data, including the development of appropriate indicators.

18. There is growing worldwide interest in child-focused budgets which could prove beneficial to the girl child by providing analysis that highlights specific impacts on girls, and suggesting methods for targeting their needs more accurately.¹⁹ Few countries currently incorporate a children's rights perspective into their budgetary processes and few donors request it when working with countries on poverty-reduction strategies or similar frameworks.²⁰

19. The renewed commitment to the implementation of internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals, has implications for the girl child. Increased attention to the girl child in national policy development and monitoring and reporting processes, such as the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers and the national MDG reports, is critical for accelerating the elimination of discrimination and violence against the girl child.

III. Objectives of the Expert Group Meeting

20. The overall objective of the Expert Group Meeting is to share achievements, lessons learned, and good practices, critically examine factors that impede the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child, and provide concrete policy recommendations for governments, the United Nations and other relevant stakeholders.

IV. Profile of the participants

21. The Expert Group Meeting will be attended by 10 to 12 experts appointed by the Secretary-General of the United Nations. The expert group meeting will also be attended by observers from Governments, the United Nations, inter-governmental organizations, non-governmental organizations and academia.

22. In selecting the experts, the criteria of geographical balance and, to the extent possible, gender balance, will be taken into consideration. Experts will include academics and practitioners from relevant fields, in accordance with the objectives identified above. The

¹⁸ Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 4-15 September 1995 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.96.IV.13), chap. I, resolution 1, annex II, paragraph 206 (b) and A/RES/S-23/3, paragraph 77 (a)

¹⁹ UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children 2006: Excluded and Invisible*, page 65

²⁰ UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children 2006: Excluded and Invisible*, page 65

United Nations will provide travel and daily subsistence allowance to experts. Observers attend the expert group meeting at their own expense.

V. Documentation

23. The documentation for the meeting will include:
- A consultant's paper commissioned by the Division for the Advancement of Women, outlining the major issues to be discussed;
 - Papers prepared by experts on specific issues in line with their expertise;
 - Papers prepared by observers.

VI. Organization

24. The EGM will be organized by the Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW) of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, in collaboration with UNICEF and the Innocenti Research Centre, Florence, Italy.

25. The EGM will be conducted in English and all documentation will be in English.

26. The EGM will meet in plenary and in working groups. In an opening plenary meeting, presentations by the experts will create a conceptual framework for discussions. The plenary will be followed by in-depth discussion of specific issues in working groups and drafting of the report.

VII. Expected Outcome

27. The Report of the Expert Group Meeting, containing a summary of the discussion and recommendations, will be adopted by the experts on the final day of the meeting. The report will be distributed at the fifty-first session of the Commission on the Status of Women and will be made available on the website of the Division for the Advancement of Women. The findings will also be presented at the interactive expert panel during the fifty-first session of the CSW.

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